

# Moving & Learning TOGETHER!

**"Reading! Ninety minutes of reading! For kindergarten!"** The school's kindergarten teacher, Ms.

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**PHOTOS BY ROY GUMPEL**

teaching important physical and cooperative learning skills, as well as a way to connect to the

Costello, was becoming increasingly annoyed with the intense focus on academics at the expense of other important parts of her program. "The children need exercise, and social skills, and music, and time outdoors..." her voice trailed off as she contemplated getting all the other important things into the day.

That night, thumbing through her resources and searching the Internet, Ms. Costello realized that for the rest of the year, she would have to be creative about using other parts of her program to meet these goals and expectations. She decided that planned physical activities were going to have a central place in her kindergarten. And with so much to do and so little time, she would use them as a major way of

natural world, enjoy music and, of course, develop reading skills.

Ms. Costello was impressed by the message of NAEYC's *Active for Life*, which emphasized the idea that children need to have planned opportunities to develop physical skills, since development doesn't just happen during recess. (If, in fact, there is a recess.) She learned that physical skills can be grouped in three ways: locomotor (running, walking, skipping), stability (balancing, jumping), and manipulative (throwing, catching, and batting). Children who work on developing these skills as they grow can become confident, physically active adults, which is something our society needs to encourage.





## It's important to support and encourage movement in every classroom learning center

Feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the long list of skills she needed to think about and plan for, she took inspiration from early childhood expert Mimi Chenfeld's observation: "Moving is as natural to learning as breathing is to living. Movement is a legitimate way of learning. It is not a frill. Movement is the way some people learn best. Children who rarely succeed will find many opportunities for building a healthy self-image and strengthening self-confidence if movement is used in all areas of the curriculum."

Ms. Costello looked around her room and—understanding that movement is natural and needed—decided she would try to weave it into all aspects of her program's curriculum.

### The Space for Movement

Today's trend toward viewing the classroom as a place for small motor activities and academic learning, actually works against good movement education for young children. Large, open spaces are needed for the equipment and activities that promote good skill acquisition. A room with equipment stored for easy access (such as around the perimeter in action centers) is optimal. Children also need an open yard with storage space for equipment. In Ms. Costello's school, she was able to

use the end of the hallway for her open space, hanging hooks on the wall for the baskets of balls, jump ropes, and beanbags. She had a stack of cones and four hula-hoops as well. For 30 minutes a day, she and her assistant organized the class in small groups and helped them move through action centers, solving problems such as "How high can you bounce that ball?" or "How can you move the bean bag through the path?"

While she added motor activities to most of her centers, she also offered structured activities in the classroom. While half the class was in the large open area, she engaged the other half in cooperative physical activities. In the spring, she used a nature theme to unify the activities. Hula-hoops on the floor were imaginary ponds through which silly "Frog" and "Toad" hopped backward. On the rug, little snake pairs wiggled, one hanging onto the other's feet, and tried to get out of the nest to find food. In the math center, strips of tape made a V on the floor, which became a river that had to be jumped over while holding hands. Chairs lined up in a row created a tunnel for a nature walk, while a series of linked cardboard boxes were a cave for sleepy bears to emerge from. A wide board going from the floor to a chair was a mountainside to crawl or walk up, with children helping each other hold their balance.

## Guided Movement Outdoors

The kindergarten teacher tried to take the children outside every day. She often took a prop box outdoors with her, which included:

- \* Crepe paper streamers or ribbon sticks which inspired children to "run like the wind"
- \* Handfuls of silky scarves which became leaves or blossoms to fling and wave
- \* Cones that made "secret paths through the play yard" where one child could lead another while describing imaginary events
- \* A basket of balls of various textures and sizes for throwing and catching
- \* Chalk for making lines to balance on and jump over

She was amazed by the way the children's creativity blossomed in the fresh spring air. "Wild horses" often galloped around the perimeter of the play space. "Tame horses" held scarves around their waists and patiently walked while "owners" held

the reins. Ms. Costello always appreciated the children's inventive movements, and tried to reinforce the themes with books whenever possible.

When teachers regard movement as a basic need of children and resolve to work with them, rather than against them by unnecessarily inhibiting movement, it fosters a cooperative atmosphere both in and out of the classroom. Children do not need to feel ashamed of their physicality and restlessness. Well-known psychologist Dr. Stanley Greenspan, a regular contributor to *Early Childhood Today*, has said that for every event for infants and young children, there is a corresponding emotion. Positive emotions are created when children's desires to be active are respected through appropriate activities.

Keep in mind that while *you* may have to stretch to warm up before physical activities, young children are typically ready to go. Also, remember that children really don't like repetitive drill activities or structured aerobics. Their minds are too active for boring repetitions. Keep physical activities fun with novelty and change. ECT

**M**ovement is a basic need of children and supports cooperation in the classroom

## The Home-School Connection

Suggest that parents try these activities at home with their children. Emphasize that the most important aspect of these activities is that families can enjoy them together.

**TAKE NEIGHBORHOOD FITNESS WALKS.** Hold hands while running and skipping down the sidewalk. Balance on low walls. Jump up and down low steps.

**PLAY CATCH** with soft foam balls, balloons, or yarn balls. Your child will be more eager to throw and catch if he doesn't have to worry about hurt fingers.

**ASK YOUR CHILD TO HELP CARRY** laundry and groceries to build strong muscles. Acknowledge those muscles with admiration.

**LET YOUR CHILD VACUUM** for a few minutes under your supervision, praising his helpfulness and strength.

**ASK YOUR CHILD TO RETRIEVE OBJECTS** that have rolled under furniture—the twisting

and turning and effort to not bump his head builds coordination.

**CONSTRUCT AN OBSTACLE COURSE TOGETHER** made of chairs, pillows, and tables. Coordination is required to navigate it and you can gently increase the level of difficulty.

**PLAY MUSIC OFTEN AND DANCE AROUND A BIT.** Don't forget to sing, too! Singing and dancing are universal forms of play. Your child loves to see you play and doesn't care a bit if you are off key or out of step.

**PLAY SOME QUICK GAMES OF CHASE** in a safe area. End with a hug when you catch your little bug!

**MINIMIZE THE TIME THAT YOUR CHILD IS CONFINED IN A CAR SEAT.** Walk or bike whenever possible.

**OFFER AND ENJOY THE MOST NUTRITIOUS DIET** you can provide. Emphasize how you love to see your child grow and develop strength.

# Young Children's Physical Skills

Below is a chart describing physical skills young children may have at different ages and stages.

Age	children may
<b>2 to 3 YEARS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> walk up and down stairs; jump off one step</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> kick a ball</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> stand and walk on tiptoe</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> run; dodge</li> </ul>
<b>3 to 4 YEARS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> walk backward and forward unself-consciously; turn and stop well</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> jump off low steps or objects, but find it hard to jump over objects</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> begin to ride trikes and pump on swings</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> stand on one foot unsteadily; balance with difficulty on low four-inch-wide balance beam while watching their feet</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> play actively, but tire suddenly</li> </ul>
<b>4 to 5 YEARS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> skip unevenly; run well</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> stand on one foot for five seconds or more; master the low balance beam</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> alternate feet when walking down stairs; judge well when placing feet on climbing structures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> jump on a small trampoline</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> show awareness of things in surrounding environment, such as cars on streets, but still need supervision and help protecting self</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have increased endurance in play</li> </ul>
<b>5 to 6 YEARS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> walk backward quickly; skip and run with agility and speed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> incorporate motor skills into games</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> walk a two-inch balance beam easily; jump over objects</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> hop well; jump down several steps; jump rope</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> climb well; coordinate movements for swimming or bike riding</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> show uneven perceptual judgment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have high energy levels in play and rarely show signs of fatigue; find inactivity difficult and seek active games and environments</li> </ul>
<b>6+ YEARS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have increased coordination for catching and throwing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> be able to participate in active games with rules</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> sequence motor activities, as with gymnastics or shooting baskets</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have improved reaction time in responding to things like thrown balls</li> </ul>

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